

# HELPING YOUR LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT

In a wildfire, your local fire department has two priorities - to remove you and your family from harm's way and to stop the progression of the wildfire. If your home happens to be in the wildfire's path, they may or may not be able to protect it - there are simply no guarantees.

During a major wildfire event, fire protection resources will likely be overwhelmed. There are either too few resources, resources are hampered (lack of access, poor water pressure, etc.) or resources are committed to evacuation and rescue, rather than suppression, resulting in large numbers of structures with no firefighter protection.

**Structural triage** is the evaluation of a structure by fire fighting resources to determine the relative difficulty of defending it from a wildfire. Location, access, fuel clearances, ignition potential of the structure and firefighter safety are all quickly considered. The combination of these factors lead to decisions to **commit or not commit** firefighters to defend the structure. Decisions range from "cannot defend" (structures at the end of long, steep, narrow driveways with shake roofs and no vegetation clearance) to "defendable" (homes easily accessed, with turnarounds for fire engines, adequate clearance, and fire resistant roofing).

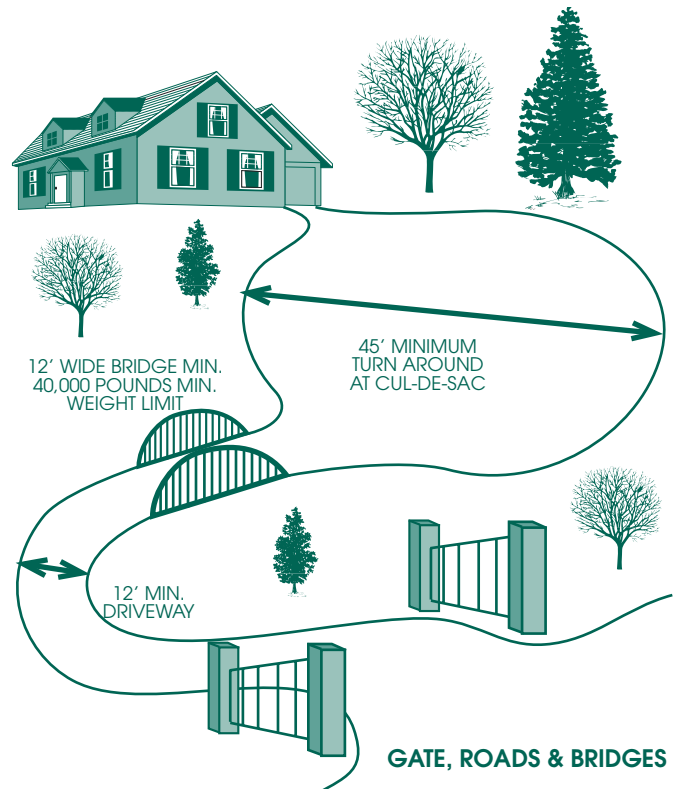
Consequently, you must take action before a fire starts.

Even if you modify your home's landscape to incorporate the most fire-resistant materials and design into your home's construction, there is no guarantee that a wildfire will not threaten your home. It is important that your local fire department be able to find and defend your home.

Here are some suggestions on how to modify your property to accommodate your local fire department.

### Access

- Keep driveways as short as possible, but not too steep or the surface too loose and slippery for a large vehicle like a fire truck.
- Have plenty of room at the end of a driveway for a fire truck to turn around in or to park while protecting your house.
- If the driveway is over 150 feet, there should be a turnout at the midpoint large enough to allow two vehicles to pass.



### GATE, ROADS & BRIDGES

- Clear vegetation back for at least 15 feet and limb and prune large trees up for 15 feet. Branches, which overhang the driveway, should be trimmed up to 15 feet.
- Be sure the name of your road is posted at each intersection in a least 4-inch tall letters (white letters on a reflectorized green background is easily recognized by emergency personnel day or night).
- If the house cannot be seen from the road, the address should be at the driveway entrance or on the mailbox. The home itself should have the address prominently displayed in large numbers, which contrast with the house color.



### SIGNAGE

- Bridges should be wide enough and strong enough to support a fire truck and your address should be posted where the driveway leaves the access road. Access roads should ideally be two lanes wide or at least have turnouts every several hundred feet or so. Dead end roads should be avoided entirely.
- If your home is gated, it is very important that the gate opens inward and be wide enough to accommodate the fire fighting equipment. Experts also recommend that the gate be at least 30 feet off of the main road, so that the equipment can pull off the road to open the gate. If the gate is locked, the lock should not be so strong that firefighters cannot break it in an emergency.



For more information about the Tennessee Firewise Communities Program, contact the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry, P.O. Box 40627, Nashville, TN 37204; 615-837-5537; Fax: 615-837-5129 or visit our Web site at:  
[www.state.tn.us/agriculture/forestry](http://www.state.tn.us/agriculture/forestry)